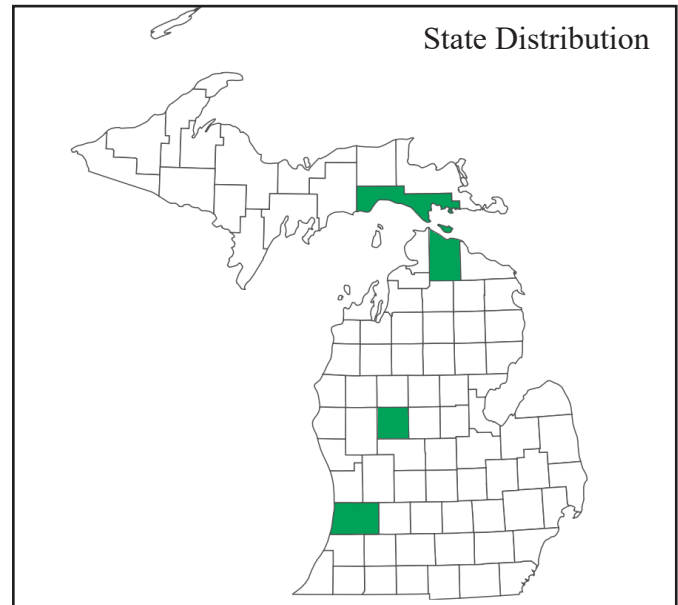


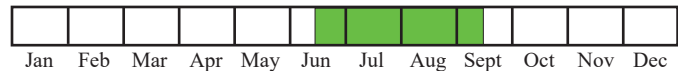
Hypericum swinkianum Wilhelm & Rericha Swink's St. John's-wort



Photograph by R. Schipper, courtesy of Michigan Flora



Best Survey Period



Legal status: State Special Concern

Global and state rank: GNR (Not ranked) / SNR (Not ranked)

Synonyms: *Hypericum kalmianum* L.

Family: Hypericaceae

Taxonomy: Hypericaceae (St. John's-wort family) has historically been treated as a part of the larger family, Clusiaceae, but it has been recognized as an independent familial group in more recent years (Stevens 2007). Members of the Hypericaceae typically possess oppositely arranged, simple leaves. Depending on the species, they may produce flowers bearing four or five petals, and all species produce stamens with long filaments. Different species produce styles in counts of three, four, or five. These flowers usually give way to dry seed-bearing capsules (Go Botany 2026). Hypericaceae possess approximately six genera, with *Hypericum* being the most speciose genus — representing over 500 accepted species (POWO 2026a, b), although some authorities argue for further sub-division of genera.

In Michigan Flora, members of the *Hypericum* genus are distinguished from other members of the Hypericaceae by their bright yellow, overtly open blooms (Reznicek et al. 2011a). *Hypericum swinkianum* is a member of the subsection *Centrosperma* — a clade of *Hypericum* known in part by their shrubby habit and five-parted flowers and capsules. Specimens of *H. swinkianum* were previously classified with another subsection *Centrosperma* species, *H. kalmianum*, but the two species were formally differentiated in 2016 on the basis of physiology and habitat preference (Wilhelm and Rericha 2016).

Total Range: *Hypericum swinkianum* is an endemic of the Great Lakes region; populations are known from a relatively narrow band spanning Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois; these populations are primarily concentrated near Lake Michigan (iNaturalist 2026, POWO 2026c). One additional population is known from Lucas County in Ohio (K. Milliam, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, personal communication). *H. swinkianum* is ranked SN1 (critically imperiled) in Indiana, but due to its relatively recent description, it is not yet ranked in other states (NatureServe 2026).



Michigan Natural Features Inventory

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State Distribution: Within Michigan, *Hypericum swinkianum* is verifiably known from Allegan, Cheboygan, Mackinac, and Mecosta Counties, with 70% of corroborated observations coming from Allegan County (Reznicek et al. 2011b, MNFI 2025). However, this preponderance of observations in Allegan County may reflect a disproportionate quantity of survey work completed in the Allegan State Game Area rather than a legitimate abnormality in the distribution of *H. swinkianum*.

The distribution of *H. swinkianum* towards Michigan's western half is possibly a reflection of this species' edaphic preferences (i.e., soil). More-acidic sandy sites prove advantageous for *H. swinkianum* (Reznicek et al. 2011b, Wilhelm and Rericha 2016), and sandy soils prevail in this portion of the state (USDA and MSU 1981).

Recognition: *Hypericum swinkianum* forms a round shrub, reaching nearly two meters in height with notably **dark, sleek, plump foliage** (Wilhelm and Rericha 2016, Dosmann and Thomas 2023). During peak bloom, this shrub's **branches are terminated with a compound dichasia arrangement of showy yellow flowers** (Dosmann and Thomas 2023). The inflorescences possess 15 or more flowers that mature into five-parted seed-bearing capsules (Reznicek et al. 2011a, Wilhelm and Rericha 2016).

In Michigan, *Hypericum swinkianum* could be mistaken for two other shrubby species in its genus: *H. prolificum* (shrubby St. John's wort) and *H. kalmianum* (Kalm's St. John's-wort). *Hypericum swinkianum* can be differentiated from the closely related *H. prolificum* in several ways including inflorescences and habitat: *H. swinkianum* has **strictly terminal inflorescences**, while *H. prolificum* has both terminal blooms and axillary blooms (i.e., from branch buds) (Reznicek et al. 2011a). Additionally, *H. swinkianum* is often component of wet environments, while *H. prolificum* is typically found in dryer environments (Reznicek et al. 2011b, c).

Hypericum swinkianum can be distinguished from

H. kalmianum using several physical characteristics and environmental preferences: **leaf width, sepal length, number of flowers and soil acidity**. The leaves of *H. swinkianum* are wider [10.5 - 15 mm (0.4 – 0.6 in)] than in *H. kalmianum*, which seldom approach this width. Most sepals of *H. swinkianum* are longer [greater than 10.5 mm (0.4 in)] than those of *H. kalmianum*, which seldom reach this length. A final physical trait used in distinguishing the two species is that *H. swinkianum* may have 15 or more flowers per dichasia, while *H. kalmianum* seldom exceeds 7 flowers per dichasia (Reznicek et al. 2011a). On the basis of habitat, *H. swinkianum* is characteristic of acidic soils, whereas *H. kalmianum* is characteristic of alkaline, calcareous soils (Reznicek et al. 2011d, b, Wilhelm and Rericha 2016).

Best survey time/phenology: The best time to survey for *H. swinkianum* is mid-June through mid-September. Reproductive components are best in differentiating *H. swinkianum* from closely related species. Phenological data suggests that blooming peaks for this species in July, with a precipitous climb in flowering events through June (iNaturalist 2026). Fruiting individuals become notable in July and slowly increase in abundance through September; all reproductive components appear to be absent come October (iNaturalist 2026). Another benefit of this specific window is the presence of mature vegetation: the immature foliage of *H. swinkianum* prior to June may be mistaken for *H. kalmianum* (Reznicek et al. 2011b).

Habitat: *H. swinkianum* prevails in mesic to wet, open environments with mildly- to strongly-acidic, sandy soils (Wilhelm and Rericha 2016). *H. swinkianum* has been found in natural communities spanning bog margins, mesic- to wet- sand prairies, coastal plain marshes, dunes adjacent to wetlands, and even wet-mesic flatwoods (Wilhelm and Rericha 2016, MacKinnon et al. 2024, MNFI 2025).

There is ambiguity regarding this species' tolerance to disturbance. While most observations are from relatively in-tact environments, one observation



includes a population in a fairly dry roadside ditch (Ross 2000). With few confirmed records of this species, more data is needed to make a conclusive inference.

Michigan specimens have been associated with the following taxa: *Amelanchier interior* (serviceberry), *Andropogon gerardii* (big bluestem), *A. virginicus* (broom-sedge), *Calamagrostis canadensis* (blue-joint), *Gaultheria procumbens* (wintergreen), *Rhexia mariana* (Maryland meadow-beauty), *Rubus hispidus* (swamp dewberry), *Osmunda spectabilis* (royal fern), *Spartina* spp. (cord grasses), *Spiraea alba* (meadowsweet), *S. tomentosa* (hardhack), *Stachys hyssopifolia* (hyssop hedgenettle), *Symphyotrichum dumosum* (bushy aster), and *Vaccinium corymbosum* (highbush blueberry) (Schipper 2017, MNFI 2025). Of these associated species, *Rhexia mariana* is State Threatened in Michigan (Michigan DNR 2023).

Biology: *Hypericum swinkianum* is a small, woody shrub. Due to the relatively recent recognition of *H. swinkianum* as a distinct species, very little research has been conducted on its specific life history. *H. swinkianum* has been cultivated with few issues in the Arnold Arboretum's living collection (M.S. Dosmann, Arnold Arboretum, personal communication), but it is not widely studied for its natural history. With that said, it is possible that many of the attributes confirmed for closely related *Hypericum* spp. may also hold true for *H. swinkianum*.

Hypericum prolificum can readily reproduce from both vegetative cuttings and seed. When produced from seed, a period of cold-stratification is typically required to produce germination (Good 2023). *Hypericum prolificum* is unlikely to bloom during its first growing season, but a subsequent period of lignification facilitates a gentler transition through winter into its second year than for non-woody *Hypericum* spp. (Good 2023). The blooms of *H. prolificum* yield copious pollen but no nectar; this is a commonality for many *Hypericum* spp. (Good 2023) and likely extends to all species of the *Centrosperma* subsection.



Photograph by [Nate Martineau](#), iNaturalist

Figure 1. Leaves of Swink's St. John's-wort are 10.5 - 15 mm wide.

Despite this lack of nectar, *Hypericum* spp. are attractive to butterflies and moths (Good 2023). Pollinators that have been observed visiting *Hypericum swinkianum* include three species of beetles (*Mordella atrata*, *M. marginata*, and *Typocerus velutinus*) and five genera of bees (*Augochlora pura*, *Bombus griseocollis*, *Ceratina* spp., *Hylaeus* spp., and *Lasioglossum* spp.) (Wilhelm and Rericha 2017).

Anthonomus rutilus, a species of weevil, is known to copulate and/or oviposit in the corollas of *Hypericum* species including *H. swinkianum*. The resulting larvae will develop in the plant's maturing capsules. (Wilhelm and Rericha 2017). Several species of Lepidoptera appear to have an obligate relationship with *Hypericum* spp. as larval host plants, including Michigan species such as *Iodopepla u-album* (burgundy St. John's wort moth) and *Nedra ramosula* (gray half-spot moth) (Hall et al. 2026a, b). Known pests of *Hypericum* species include fungal pathogens such as rusts and *Dematophora* root rot (UC IPM 2017).

Seeds are likely dispersed by gravity, with wind and water serving as additional methods of seed movement as is seen with other *Hypericum* species (USDA 2022).





Photograph by R. Schipper, courtesy of Michigan Flora

Figure 2. Growth habit of Swink's St. John's-wort.

Hypericum perforatum is known to cause photosensitization in livestock (itching and increased heart-rate) (Naegele 1996); this trait could extend to *H. swinkianum*.

Conservation/management: Michigan has four extant records of *Hypericum swinkianum* (MNFI 2025). Of these populations, three have been ranked as B, C, and D, and one population did not have its viability assessed. Habitat integrity is potentially important lever impacting population health as a near-road population had the lowest rank of all element occurrences (MacKinnon et al. 2024).

Little is known about the natural history and statewide distribution of *Hypericum swinkianum*. This species' recognition is fairly novel, and the few documented observations may not directly reflect its total range. Herbarium records of *H. kalmianum* should be revisited and their identities validated (Reznicek et al. 2011b, Wilhelm & Rericha 2016). This should be paired with systematic surveys of suitable habitats to develop a comprehensive conservation plan and to better understand the species' distribution and ecology in Michigan.

In locations where *H. swinkianum* is present, main-

taining an open canopy is prudent. This may mean a management plan incorporating disturbance regimes that prevent the encroachment of tall woody species. In natural communities where fire has historically been a significant force of disturbance, a burn regime should be established/maintained. Protection of natural hydrological processes may be crucial in habitats where water may be limiting canopy development.

While the tolerance of *H. swinkianum* towards human development is unclear, developing locales where *H. swinkianum* is present should be avoided until further clarity is attained.

Comments: Wilhelm and Rericha described *Hypericum swinkianum* amidst their work on *Flora of the Chicago Region: A Floristic and Ecological Synthesis* (Dosmann and Thomas 2023). In keeping with the spatial origin of this work, the specific epithet *swinkianum* is in reference to Floyd A. Swink (1921-2000), a botanist who studied and taught about the ecology of the Chicago region (Wilhelm and Rericha 2016).

Other *Hypericum* species, namely *H. perforatum*, have been used medicinally as an astringent, diuretic, stimulant, and topically as an analgesic



and antiseptic (Naegele 1996); it is conceivable that these applications could extend to *H. swinkianum*.

Research needs: The knowledge gaps for *Hypericum swinkianum* are broad in their scope. Inventories should be conducted to account for this species' actual presence throughout the state. Surveying probable locales of *H. swinkianum*, surveying known locations of *H. kalmianum* that haven't been rectified by herbarium specimen identification, and reverifying the identities of other *H. kalmianum* herbarium records should be utilized.

Many of the fundamental attributes of this species' natural history need to be investigated; most of what is presumed with respect to the life history of *H. swinkianum* and its zoological associates is assumed from its close relatives. Corroborating and/or challenging these attributes is central to developing comprehensive management plans for this species.

It is important to understand the tolerance of *Hypericum swinkianum* to environmental disturbance. The few element occurrences from Michigan indicate that habitat disturbance may affect the viability of *H. swinkianum* populations, but more data is necessary to make definitive claims.

Related abstracts: Bog, coastal plain marsh, mesic sand prairie, wet-mesic flatwoods, wet-mesic sand prairie, *Rhexia mariana* (Maryland meadow-beauty)

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Photograph by [Nate Martineau](#), iNaturalist

Figure 3. Five-parted fruiting capsules.

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